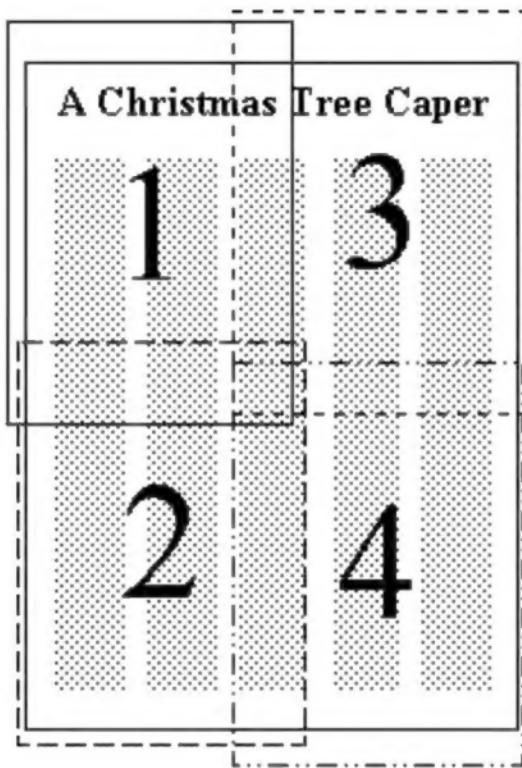


NOTE: This newspaper appearance was divided and enlarged to fill 8 ½" x 11" pages, roughly in the manner shown below.





RUMORS OF HOW THE RUSSIANS PLAN TO "ENTERTAIN" AT THE UPCOMING AIR SHOW SWEEP THE ASIATIC AIR FORCE'S GUESTS.

Pigment of the Imagination

By JACK RITCHIE

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THERE is a large and somewhat startling abstract painting on the east wall of my living room.

I am not a devotee of that form of expression—

frankly I regard the work as a badly wounded piece of canvas—however it is an original Edgar Purdy and therefore I cherish it for historical, if not esthetic, reasons.

I first met Edgar Purdy four years ago when I knocked at the door of his studio.

Purdy was a tall man with independent black hair and he scowled. "Well?"

"Mr. Purdy," I said. "I've heard a great deal about your paintings." Actually I'd never even known of his existence until that morning.

He studied me. "I suppose you saw my exhibition at the McGivern Galleries last week?"

"I found it fascinating. My name is Williams. Charles Williams."

His dark eyes were sharp. "And now naturally you'd like to see some more of my work?"

"If I may?"

He stood aside and offered me the entire high-ceilinged studio.

KNEW HE HAD LIED

His paintings were scattered around the room and he watched me with folded arms as I wandered about.

"By the way, Mr. Williams," he said after a while, "I haven't had a showing in three months and there is no market for the

tainly wouldn't want to intrude."

"But you are anyway, so why not come out into the open?"

Downstairs we got into his sedan and he pulled away from the curb. He drove carefully, even cautiously, and so I was a bit surprised when after a mile he ran through a stop light and narrowly missed a car coming from the right.

GROWLS AT DRIVER OF CAR HE MISSED

We left the blare of an indignant horn behind us and Edgar growled. "That peasant ought to be barred from the streets."

I looked back and the light was still red.

He parked the car on Twenty-eighth and we entered a small restaurant.

Susan Swanson had startling violet eyes that regarded me with caution when Edgar said, "This is Charles Williams. He's a lawyer your father sent to look me over. A useless errand, since I have nothing to hide."

"Absolutely nothing," Susan agreed emphatically. "Edgar is frank, open, above-board. The very essence of integrity."

Edgar nodded. "An artist is very essence of integrity."

I sat down at the table. "You must realize, Miss Swanson, that Edgar's first love could very

She studied the menu with undue determination. "The 'O' is for Olivia."

I saw that Edgar was about to leave Marchek's table. "Excuse me a moment. I'll be right back."

I met Edgar in the middle of the room and drew him aside. "Suppose I were to offer you twenty thousand dollars to break your engagement to Susan?"

"I would knock you down," Edgar said. Then he looked about to make sure that we weren't being overheard. "Could you make it thirty thousand?"

"Ah, ha."

He flushed slightly. "I'm really quite fond of Susan, but one must be practical. Within five years or so I will undoubtedly be America's outstanding painter. But I don't love Susan and I know that she doesn't love me. However, I need money and Susan is stubborn about marrying me. A combination like that is hard to beat."

"But twenty thousand would do it?"

"Twenty-seven?" he suggested hopefully.

"Edgar," I said. "You value your painting above everything else in this world?"

"Why, yes," he said, puzzled by the question. "It's my whole life. Even after I discovered that I . . ." He stopped.

"Edgar," I said. "I could finish that sentence for you."

THREATENS TO REVEAL SECRET

He frowned. "What do you

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His paintings were scattered around the room and he watched me with folded arms as I wandered about.

"By the way, Mr. Williams," he said after a while, "I haven't had a showing in three months and there is no such place as the McGivern Galleries."

My smile was rather painful. "A bit warm in here, isn't it?"

"Not for me." Purdy walked to the easel where he had evidently been working. He applied a streak of cadmium yellow to the canvas. "Just what do you know about art, Mr. Williams?"

"Well, I did finger painting in grade school and all this seems to bring back memories."

He smiled thinly. "You were sent here by Jonas Swanson?"

That was true, but I said nothing.

"Let's not be coy," Purdy said impatiently. "I've been expecting something like this for weeks. Just how much is Swanson offering me not to marry Susan?"

I cleared my throat. "At present I'm here merely to make a general estimate of your moral fiber, integrity, earnestness and all that sort of thing."

I had the faint impression that he was disappointed.

"And if I don't pass?"

"Well," I said, "I guess then we might move on to money."

"You're the Swanson family lawyer, I suppose?"

"My father is, but he's in North Dakota hunting ducks right now." I rather wished I were too at the moment.

Edgar wiped his hands on a rag. "I love Susan dearly and vice versa. I don't care the faintest what her father thinks."

"Suppose he cuts her off without a cent?"

He shrugged. "I cannot be bought off."

"I wasn't offering. At least not yet."

He glanced at his watch and then removed his smock. "I have a luncheon date with Susan. Why don't you come along and investigate this further?"

"Now really," I said with a trace of embarrassment. "I cer-

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I sat down at the table. "You must realize, Miss Swanson, that Edgar's first love could very easily be painting."

She dismissed that. "I'll always be in the background, encouraging him, thinking up titles for his pictures, keeping him away from the bottle during working hours."

"I drink nothing but Coke," Edgar said. "But I appreciate the gesture."

"I'm known for my startling choice of colors," Edgar said smugly. "Brilliant, bizarre, grotesque. Color is the message I give the world."

"A point, Miss Swanson," I said. "Do you happen to love him?"

"What a ridiculous personal question," she said stiffly. "I refuse to dignify it with an answer."

Edgar rose from the table. "That's Anton Marchek of the Winston Galleries across the room. I've got to speak to him for a moment."

When he was gone, I turned to Susan. "It's your father's opinion that you might be able to see Edgar in a plainer light if you weren't so stubborn."

She took a deep breath. "I respect my father and I love him. But he simply must realize that I am over twenty-one and therefore legally, chronologically, emotionally and intellectually capable of ruining . . . I mean running my life."

We were silent for a while and then I said, "How did this all happen?"

She caught herself before she completed the sigh. "Edgar is different from anyone I've ever met," she said defensively.

I conceded that was possible.

"You must admit that he is fascinating in a . . ." She stopped. "I mean he's so honestly egotistic. Never a moment of doubt."

"I can't help noticing the initials on your handbag," I said. "S.O.S."

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He frowned. "What do you mean?"

"Your career would be ruined if I told everyone what I found out a little while ago," I said softly.

He stared at me and then whitened. "You couldn't know!"

"But I do. Shall I go over to Marchek and tell him?"

"No, no!" he said swiftly. He took a weary breath. "I'll go over to Susan and break the engagement."

Ten minutes later when he stalked past me and left the restaurant, I rejoined Susan.

She was speechless but apparently not heartbroken. Finally she managed to say something. "Just like that! He called off the engagement." Her eyes narrowed. "Just what did you say to him?"

Susan tells me that the next year was utterly maddening for her and she claims that the only reason she continued to see me was to find out what I'd said to Edgar.

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I finally had to tell her after we finished unwrapping our wedding presents and I brought out the painting I'd commissioned from Purdy.

You see, I happened to know why Edgar Purdy ran through that traffic light. All of them have the red on the top and the

green at the bottom. But the lights on Sixteenth were reversed. Probably an accident when they were installed.

So today Susan and I are the only two people in the world, besides Edgar Purdy, who know that he's color blind.

THE END

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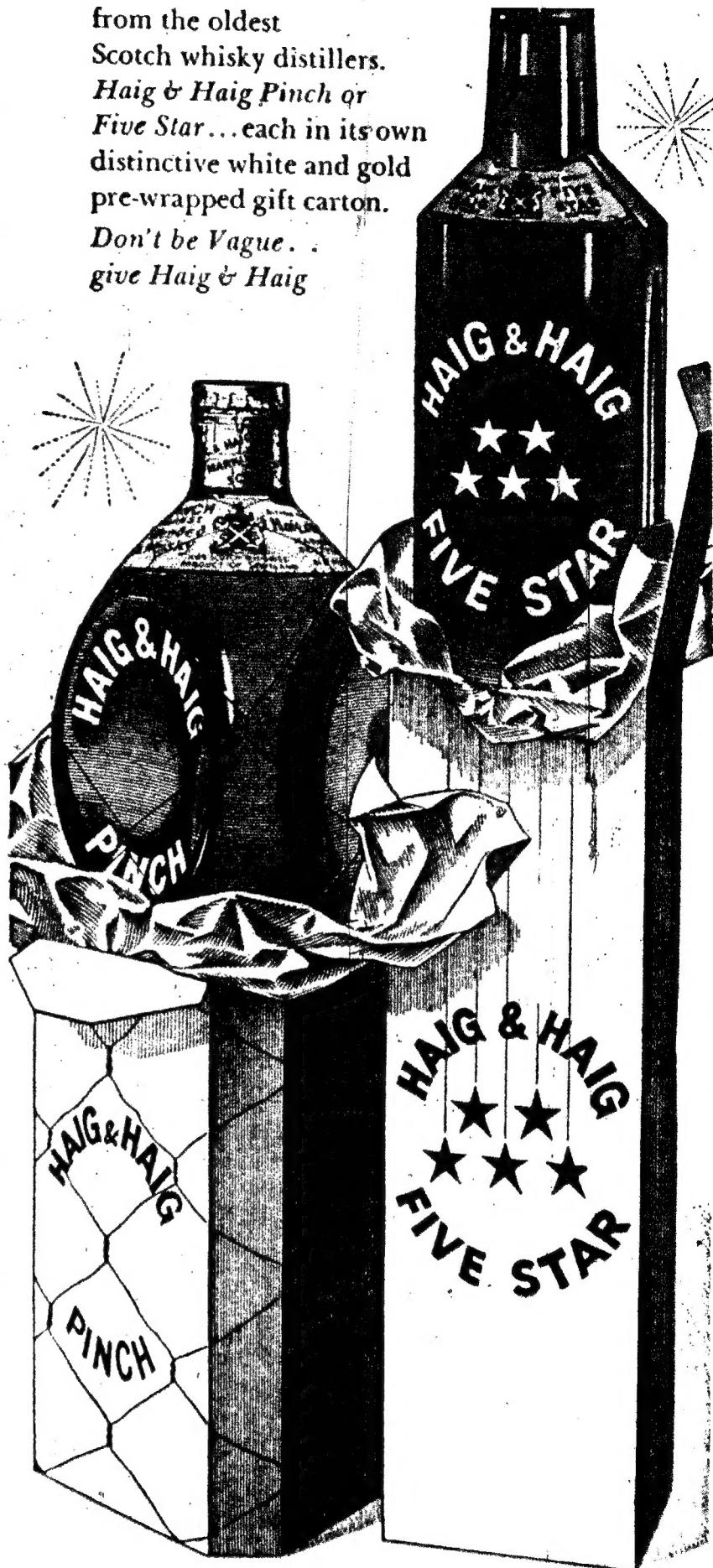
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